



WHO Europe 67 Agenda Item 5. Policy and technical topics 5 (d)

67/11 Strengthening Member State collaboration on improving access to medicines in the WHO European Region

IAHPC and WHPCA Statement

In the WHO European Region, ensuring access to high quality, affordable medicines and promoting their responsible use are key aspects of the people-centred health systems priority area under Health 2020. At its 65th session, the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, in resolution EUR/RC65/R5, unanimously endorsed Priorities for Health Systems Strengthening in the WHO European Region 2015–2020: walking the talk on people-centredness (document EUR/RC65/13), which set out two strategic priorities: • transforming health services to meet the health challenges of the 21st century; and • moving towards universal health coverage for a Europe free of impoverishing out-of-pocket payments.

Unequivocal evidence supports the benefits of the appropriate use of strong opioids, such as morphine, in the provision of pain and symptom control in palliative and end of life care.

Impoverishing out of pocket payments often result from lack of access to palliative care under Universal Health Coverage in general, and unaffordable palliative care medicines in particular. The ATOME (Access to Opioid Medicines Europe) Report found that “In the twelve European countries addressed by this project, strict regulations and inappropriate policies were found to have negative impact on adequate access to opioid medicines. Major barriers were found to exist in these countries in the field of legislation; national policies; knowledge and societal attitudes; and economic aspects, *including affordability.*” (P.1)

High costs underpin impoverishing out-of-pocket payments for expensive opioid medicines when generic oral morphine (an essential medicine on the WHO Model List) is unavailable as a result of negative market incentives.

The findings of the review of national policies illustrate that beside barriers in the national legislation there are also several challenges concerning national policy strategies with regard to improved access to opioids and the use of these medicines for medical treatment. A detailed analysis of documents collected throughout the ATOME project and discussions with national stakeholders showed major challenges to opioid access in four areas; financial and economic aspects and *governmental support*, formularies, education and training, and societal attitudes. The analysis resulted in individual reports for each country, including recommendations on how to address the identified barriers and improve access to opioid medicines in relation to country specific backgrounds.

IAHPC and WHPCA stand ready to assist WHO Europe in forming a technical advisory committee to help governments improve their level of support by implementing the major recommendations of the report and improve access to controlled medicines. This policy will also align with SDG Target 3.8.